

Apocalypse 668

Chapter 668 New Faces?

After ensuring that everyone was unharmed, Sparrow gazed silently ahead at the road, fully aware that it wouldn't be long before their brothers arrived from the hidden base to surround them.

The commotion near the base's perimeter had undoubtedly set off alarms, and by now, their comrades were likely gearing up and rushing to the scene. Their methods were as ruthless and decisive as their master, Duke.

Understanding this, Sparrow and the rest of the Winters refrained from making any sudden movements. Instead, they remained exactly where they were, knowing that any misstep could spell trouble for all of them.

"Is everyone alright?!" Sparrow asked, pulling his gaze back from the road ahead.

"Captain, everyone's fine—just minor scratches, no major injuries," one of the Winters' men reported, his tone careful as he continued scanning their perimeter. He moved from window to window, ensuring their brothers had yet to arrive. They needed to stay alert—if those idiots opened fire without confirming their targets, they could end up taking out their own.

Usually, the Winters' men wouldn't make such a mistake, but without any transmission from Duke's private satellite phone or their brothers confirming their return, they had to assume anyone approaching was an enemy. Besides, no one would have expected their own team to fall into a trap they had set themselves.

After all, they had grown up together, endured the same rigorous training, and followed the same teachings. The idea that Sparrow would drive straight through the landmine zone without prior contact or even a heads-up through their usual channels was unthinkable.

But what choice did Sparrow and his group have? They had no way to send a signal—no walkie-talkies, no satellite phones. Those were left behind at the base, deemed too important to risk losing outside, where they could fall into the enemy's hands and be used to locate their hidden base in City A.

Due to their cautious nature and the unexpected need to head to City A, Sparrow and the rest had left their satellite phones behind in the villa, never anticipating they would require them so urgently.

Without a means of communication, not even a gun or a flare to signal their brothers at the hidden base, they were left with no clear way to attract their attention. Sparrow racked his brain for any possible method to alert them as quickly as possible, knowing that every second counted.

So, no one blamed Sparrow for blowing up their vehicle.

"Alright, since everyone is fine, tend to the wounded and stay inside. No one steps out, or you'll be blasted to pieces," Sparrow warned, his tone deliberately harsh. He figured it was better to scare the children now than risk their curiosity leading them outside, especially in such a dangerous situation.

After making sure they understood, Sparrow nonchalantly made his way to the large hole in the bus left by the explosion. The vehicle now leaned precariously against a tree at the side of the road.

After staring at the gaping opening for a brief moment, he reached up, gripping the charred end of the ceiling at the edge of the open hole. Then, with effortless strength, he pulled himself up, his muscles flexing as he lifted his body before smoothly flipping himself onto the roof.

Once on the roof, Sparrow adjusted his position and sat cross-legged, finding a comfortable spot. He closed his eyes and began meditating—at least this way, he could be productive while waiting for his brothers to arrive.

More importantly, his elevated position would make it easier for his brothers to recognize him, ensuring that no one mistakenly opened fire without verifying their targets. The alternative—well, he didn't even want to think about that.

The Winters' men, after tending to the injured and calming the frightened children, took up defensive positions inside the bus. They remained alert, scanning the surroundings for any signs of their approaching comrades, ready to call out as soon as they spotted them.

Two hours passed. The men from Group 6 stood at a distance from each other in different positions, their mouths twitching in frustration. They had expected their brothers to arrive swiftly—within 20 to 30 minutes at most—but now, two hours had dragged on with no sign of them.

"What's taking them so long? Are they gearing up for war and bringing a tank with them before heading here?!" one of the Winters' men muttered, glancing out the window with a mix of impatience and disbelief.

"Not sure. Maybe they relocated? Otherwise, I can't explain the delay in their crisis response," another man replied from the other side.

Meanwhile, Sparrow remained silent, deep in meditation. He was attempting to dispel the strange disorientation that had been plaguing them for some time now—likely caused by the status abnormality—and, at the same time, expand his spiritual energy pool while reinforcing his body's foundation for his next level-up.

Beads of sweat formed on his forehead as he concentrated, but something felt off. His spiritual energy wasn't flowing smoothly through his core. Instead, it felt blocked and disrupted, turning what was once a clear, straight path into a tangled mess. Every attempt to guide his energy only made it more exhausting, as if he were trying to untangle a knot that refused to loosen. No matter how much he tried, he couldn't straighten it out.

'This must be the reason we're feeling so disoriented. It's not just physical exhaustion that can be fixed with rest. That scent specifically targeted our minds, turning our dantians into a tangled mess. It was likely designed to ensure that anyone facing that mutated insect wouldn't be able to fight properly. Even superhumans would struggle to manage a counterattack under its influence.'

'Fortunately, my team and I have strong mental fortitude, and since I've already reached Level 2, the effect on me has lessened slightly.'

Sparrow focused, steadying his breathing as he tried to realign the disrupted flow of his spiritual energy, guiding it back toward his core.

"Ugh! It's not working!" Sparrow's eyes snapped open, his breath uneven as sweat clung to his back and forehead. He had been at this for too long with no success. Frustration gnawed at him—he didn't even know what else to try to shake off this cursed status abnormality.

As he opened his eyes, a flicker of movement caught his attention in the distance. His body tensed. Shifting his weight, he propped himself up, kneeling on one knee atop the bus. He rapped his knuckles against the metal beneath him—a sharp signal to the men below. Movement ahead.

Sliding toward the edge, near the gaping hole from the side, Sparrow glanced down before moving his hand. With precise Winter's hand signals, he relayed the message to his squad: 'Movement. One klick away.'

The first Winter's men to spot it wasted no time—his fingers moved in quick, silent gestures, spreading the word through the squad. Within moments, everyone assumed their positions, vigilance sharpening their movements. The source of the disturbance was unknown; it could be an ally... or an enemy. Until they knew for sure, they remained on high alert, ready for anything.

After the initial movement, nothing followed. Sparrow frowned, raising an eyebrow as he scanned the area. Silence stretched around him. Then, without further hesitation, he called out from a distance.

"Hey! How long are you gonna keep us waiting?! Are you messing with us, Eagle? Hawk?!"

But no response came. No movement followed. Unease settled in his gut.

Although he held a defensive stance, his body's condition made him uncertain. His hawk-like vision allowed him to see far, but beyond that, he couldn't be sure if the movement had truly been his own men.

He could only assume—and call out their names, hoping for an answer. If they still didn't recognize him... or worse, if they were toying with him, he had no way of knowing for sure.

After a long stretch of silence, a male voice finally rang out from the bushes Sparrow had been watching.

Maybe they had realized he had already spotted them—though how he managed to do so without binoculars was a mystery. Either way, they had no choice but to reveal themselves now.

"Put your hands up, or I'll shoot!"

Sparrow didn't recognize the voice. It sounded too young—too unfamiliar to belong to any of his brothers who had stayed behind at the hidden base or returned from other locations. He furrowed his brows but remained still, his mind racing.

Then, the grass around him rustled.

One by one, figures emerged, surrounding them. Dozens—maybe even a hundred—closed in, their sheer numbers imposing. Yet, despite their overwhelming presence, Sparrow sensed no bloodlust or hostility. Only caution.

It was unusual.

The men advanced toward the bus, weapons raised, their movements careful and deliberate.

Everyone's faces were hidden behind masks, and Sparrow didn't recognize a single one of them. His expression darkened.

'Did Eagle, Hawk and the rest leave the base?'

The last time they checked in, everyone was still there. They hadn't mentioned anything about newcomers—let alone this many. Something didn't add up.

Sparrow's gaze swept over the masked figures, but an odd feeling settled in his gut. Something was off, though he couldn't pinpoint why. More strangely, he sensed no real strength from them.

Inside the bus, the civilians began to panic, their whispers turning frantic. But the Winter's men... they remained still, mirroring Sparrow's unease. None of them knew what to make of the people surrounding their bus.

'Who are they?'

The same question echoed in everyone's minds as they peered out the windows, studying the figures surrounding them. The outsiders looked imposing—broad-shouldered, well-built—but something felt off.

They were like hollow shells.

All appearance, no real bite.

The Winter's men couldn't even take them seriously.